

status ALERT

THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Accountability is Critical

Workshop session marks first step in development of tool to measure progress

A two-day workshop session hosted recently by the Premier's Council is leading to the development of an accountability framework crucial to the success of the Alberta Disability Strategy.

By now, you know that the Premier's Council is committed to the implementation of the Alberta Disability Strategy. Essentially, it will be a policy blueprint intended to result in Full Citizenship for persons with disabilities. Policy recommendations will be made in four key areas: Personal Supports, Financial Supports, Education/Learning, and Employment. The Strategy would satisfy our province's commitment to *In Unison*, the Canadian approach to disability issues developed in 1998 by the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

"Governments are moving away from an approach where they are accountable largely to each other to an approach in which they are more accountable to the public. This shift means that jurisdictions will need to develop outcomes that are important to the public. In adopting this approach, it will be equally important for jurisdictions to focus on the process of developing an accountability framework... In focusing on *In Unison*, the federal and provincial/territorial governments could, for example, produce an annual report on the status of persons with disabilities which documents key performance measures and progress around efforts to remove barriers and promote inclusion.

—*In Unison* (1998), page 28

But how will we measure the impact of the Strategy and its recommendations? From the onset, we knew that a framework of accountability—one that would allow us to continually monitor and report on the changing status of persons with disabilities in our province—would be crucial to the success of the Strategy. By developing and implementing such a framework as a standalone initiative to complement the Strategy, we could assess the impact of the Strategy's rec-

ommendations and make changes where they failed to significantly improve the status of Albertans with disabilities.

On June 12th and 13th in Edmonton, we began the difficult process of developing such a framework. In a true spirit of collaboration, more than 70 people joined us for a Targets Workshop Session. In attendance were provincial government representatives from Standards and Measures Divisions of various key Ministries, representatives of disability organizations (many of whom have experience and interest in the area of performance indicators), and individuals and family members with experience and interests in this area.

We began by presenting for discussion a possible list of performance indicators we felt were relevant. In its 12-year history, the Premier's Council has heard from many stakeholders who have consistently identified the following list of indicators to assess the status of persons with disabilities:

- comparison of **workforce participation** rates of persons with and without disabilities (employment rates, unemployment rates, % in full time/part time, % in self-employment, etc.)
- comparison of **education levels** of persons with and without disabilities
- % of children/families requiring **special education support and adaptive technology/equipment** who are satisfied with current arrangements
- level of participation of persons with disabilities in **public policy processes**
- % of persons with disabilities satisfied with opportunities to participate in community-based **recreation, arts, culture and active living**
- % of persons with disabilities requiring **special or accessible transportation** who are satisfied with the service in their community
- % of persons with disabilities requiring **affordable, accessible housing** who are able to obtain it
- % of persons with disabilities requiring **financial support** who are satisfied that they are able to

feedback

What some participants said about the Targets Workshop Session:

"I enjoyed the opportunity to participate in the 2 day session the Premier's Council hosted this week. I thought some good ideas were generated. However, I feel that more discussion is needed about next steps and the methodology the Premier's Council will use."

"Well, it was a challenging two days but I hope you think, as I do, that your agenda did move somewhat forward. What a task, to bring 70 people representing perhaps 50 different organizations together to look for agreement? consensus? on indicators that can help inform our understanding of the changing status of persons with disabilities. I appreciated the opportunity of being involved in the project, and I am interested in staying involved on behalf of our organization to assist with the work."

"I got the impression that quite a few of the participants thought they were there to champion the rights of this group or that, when the purpose (I think) was to take that as given and zero in on the measures."

"The important thing here, at least from our point of view? To get departments used to the idea of thinking accessibility, and hold them to it through the business plans. Then assemble a limited number of representative indicators - not necessarily a comprehensive set designed to fit a model."

"I'll be pleased to help in any way I can."

live in dignity; % of Albertans with disabilities living below the poverty line

- % of persons with disabilities satisfied with **health care support** they have access to or receive
- % of persons with disabilities requiring **help with housework and household chores** who are satisfied with the help they are receiving
- % of persons with disabilities who require **home or attendant care** who are satisfied with the support they receive
- % of persons with disabilities requiring **technical aids, devices or special equipment** who feel they have been able to access appropriate disability supports

Our objective for the working session was to either adopt, modify or re-design this list to be a truer reflection of the definition of *status*—breaking each item down into three or four

measurable components. The result was to be a 36 to 48 item list that would essentially give us a reporting tool for measuring the changing status of Albertans with disabilities over time.

If the accountability framework clearly showed a decline in a particular area after the recommendations made in the Alberta Disability Strategy were implemented, then provincial departments, regional authorities and other stakeholders would be consulted as to the reasons behind the decline and would work together to achieve improvements. If, however, an area showed improvement, then best practices from one region or department would be shared with others to ensure wide-scale status improvement.

In his keynote address on the first day of the session, Dr. Gary McPherson, Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Past

Chair of the Premier's Council, urged participants not to berate themselves too much if expectations were not met; that this task was enormous, daunting and filled with potential pitfalls and frustrations. It was a cautious and challenging welcome that was to foreshadow the next two days. Our gratitude goes out to all of those who helped struggle through this difficult work, for while it sometimes felt as though little progress was being made, important issues were resolved and advancement of the Alberta Disability Strategy has, in fact, occurred:

- Family and/or Caregiver Needs have been included as performance indicators of *status*
- indicators of Potential, Full Citizenship, Personal and Income Supports, and Choice and Self-Determination are truer gauges of Improved Status for Albertans with disabilities, while strategic recommendations need to be

made addressing issues around Personal Supports, Financial Supports, Education/Learning, and Employment

- the concept of "visitability" of all residences in our communities has been incorporated into Full Citizenship
- three levels of outcomes have been identified, all with potential indicators
- the Alberta Disability Strategy conceptual framework, while holistic, needs to more clearly identify the individual.

Final analysis and recommendations from the Targets Working Session are not yet available. Once the Workshop Summaries have been prepared, every participant will receive a copy in the mail. If you or your organization wish to receive this summary, please contact the office of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Your Input is Crucial

If you're interested in what you've read in this *Status Alert*, there's a good chance you'd like to see more information and details. We'll be happy to oblige. Simply give us a call, and we'll provide documentation completed to date, including an in-depth paper on the process we propose to use to oversee development and implementation of the Strategy; meet personally with you to discuss the Alberta Disability Strategy and ways you or your organization can participate; and/or make a complete presentation on the Strategy to you and your board or employees.

Since we view everyone reading this update as a partner, we also want to make it clear that we need your assistance. In particular, as we look ahead to our next steps, we're looking for people with experience in identifying outcomes and measuring progress. If you'd like to add your input to the development of this important initiative, please contact us:

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Alberta Disability Strategy Progress Report

The Council envisions development of the Alberta Disability Strategy as a ten-step process. In addition to work on **Step 2: Finalizing Targets** described above, work proceeded in a number of other areas.

Step 4: Input from Other Jurisdictions The Council has started collecting information from its counterpart disability advisory bodies in other Canadian jurisdictions and abroad. Using interviews and internet searches, the Council will seek successful models and strategies to incorporate in the Alberta Disability Strategy, and identify potential pitfalls to avoid.

Step 5: Inventory and Evaluation In parallel to Step 4, Step 5—an inventory and analysis of all legislation, regulations, policies, programs and services pertaining to disability issues—is currently in progress. The Council has access to supplemental analyses of some policies and programs, but there has never,

to our knowledge, been an extensive and coordinated review of the systems or legislation governing all programs and/or services. This is an instrumental foundation to the development of the strategy.

Step 6: Develop/Apply Disability Lens Disability lenses, or checklists, are used by many jurisdictions to screen policy to ensure it has no negative effects on people with disabilities. Progress in Step 5 leads naturally to development of such a lens for Alberta. Each and every time the analysis points to an aspect of policy that could be improved or altered, a recom-

mendation is generated and a piece is added to the checklist. The resulting disability lens then becomes a motivational means for change and an opportunity for the Council and community stakeholders to assist with implementation at the department level. Once the checklist is addressed, it may be altered and revisited at a later date as new policy is developed.

Steps 4, 5 and 6 are all occurring in parallel and it is hoped that the bulk of this work may be completed by November 2000.

Look for another update on the Alberta Disability Strategy in the August issue of *Status Report*.

